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HONOURING INDIGENOUS ARTS, CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

Statement by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, like all Canadians, the horror of the discovery of the bodies of 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School hit me hard. I cannot fathom the pain residential school survivors and all Indigenous communities are experiencing, and their reliving of years past. Thoughts and compassion are real but not enough.

How were those innocent lives stolen? I have mentioned the heart-rending conversation I had in the early 1980s with Kwakwaka'wakw artist Art Thompson before — a survivor of the Alberni Residential School on Vancouver Island. I was director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria installing an exhibition of his amazing art. He asked for a quiet place for us to talk. Several hours later, after hearing his story, I was changed forever. I was very sad Art died before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established.

I have also spoken of the poignant visual voicing by Canadian artists of the wrongness and impacts of residential schools. Many expressed their own realities. I will recall three: *The Lesson* by Alberta artist Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *Sandy Bay* by Robert Houle, and *The Assiniboine Fool Society* by Jane Ash Poitras. They portray the burying of their traditional learnings and languages and showed their isolated, jail-like places and the inappropriateness of the colonial-only curricula. We need these truths.

In my native Manitoba I had the opportunity to work closely with two potential cultural centres celebrating Indigenous traditions, culture and art, one with Sioux Valley Dakota Nation near Brandon, the other for an Aboriginal art centre in northern Manitoba. Obstacles to both included lack of funding and bureaucratic red tape at the provincial and federal levels. That must change going forward. The pain resulting from residential schools was clear from my hearings with the former. If I was changed by Art Thompson's tales, I was doubly changed again.

In 2008, the Chief Executive Officer of the Keewatin Tribal Council, Sharon McKay, opined that the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Art Gallery should be:

... grounded in Aboriginal cultural traditions, which ensures that Aboriginals are heard and their cultural practices are maintained and not lost. It should be inclusive while safeguarding the people and providing a place where they can strive.

For the Northern Plains Aboriginal Centre in 2006, it became clear southwestern Manitoba needed a place “to celebrate the roots and accomplishments of the Aboriginal people” balancing training and cultural traditions. Repatriation was a key element.

Honourable senators, I add my commitment to do whatever I can to move reconciliation forward. I fear we will hear of more finds of horrific losses. Truth must prevail. It is time for action. I thank you from the Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, the Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene and Dakota and the heart of the Métis Nation.
